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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001433

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR A/S FRAZER, S/E WILLIAMSON, AF/SPG, AF/C
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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SUBJECT: NCP TIMELINE AND AGENDA FOR SUDAN PEOPLE'S
INITIATIVE

REF: KHARTOUM 1422

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Within the next two to three weeks, the Sudanese regime will organize a conference on Darfur to seek consensus on its much-touted, but ill-defined, "Sudan People's Initiative," intended to bring peace to the troubled region, NCP Politburo chief Mandour al Mahdi and former South Darfur Governor Atta Al Mannan told CDA and polchief September 21 in a meeting at NCP headquarters in Khartoum. The conference will address a proposed political solution, security, compensation and resettlement for IDPs, reconciliation, and development. Following the conference, the GOS will send emissaries to meet with rebel leaders including Abdel Wahid al Nur, as well as regional countries including Chad. The NCP requested US assistance in facilitating a meeting with Al Nur. These NCP officials were pleased with the meetings with Minawi in El Fasher, and urged the US to encourage Minawi to return to Khartoum. CDA warned the NCP that the regime must demonstrate progress on the ground in Darfur, not just make promises in the national conference, in order to make real progress toward peace. CDA also warned the NCP that if the regime makes a push for an ICC deferment resolution at the UNSC in the near-term before there is real progress in Darfur, the US will veto the resolution. End summary.

¶2. (C) Al Mahdi and Al Mannan, both powerful party insiders, said the conference to launch the Sudan People's ("Ahl al-Sudan") Initiative will likely take place "five days after the Eid holiday" (mid-October). They said President Bashir will chair the conference, and further stated that "we are encouraging Vice President Taha to take a greater role in the Darfur file." CDA asked if Taha would replace Presidential Advisor Nafie Ali Nafie in his role at the head of the Darfur file. Al Mahdi noted that there had been very little progress on Darfur over the last year under Nafie's leadership "ever since the death of Presidential Advisor Magzoub al Khalifa" in a car crash, who formerly had the lead on Darfur. These NCP insiders expressed the view that Taha's involvement in the Darfur file would be positive, noting Taha's constructive role in meeting with Minawi in Darfur September 19 (reftel). They requested the CDA's personal assistance in encouraging Minawi to return to Khartoum, to which CDA replied that Minawi would like to see tangible progress on the items that were discussed with VP Taha before he returns (reftel).

¶3. (C) Al Mahdi and Al Mannan said the Darfur conference will include approximately 200 participants from political parties, local authorities, tribal administration, the

government of Darfur's three states, foreign observers, and national figures and academicians. (Note: They indicated that if SE Williamson is visiting Khartoum at the same time as the conference, he would be welcome to attend. End note.) They said independent Darfuri civil society leaders such as Tijane Sese, Ibrahim Suleiman, Sadiq Ibrahim, and Idriss Hassan (some of whom were involved in the recent civil society meeting on Darfur in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania) had agreed to participate in the conference and present their proposals.

14. (C) The agenda for the conference will include a proposed political solution, external issues (the Chad dimension), reconciliation, IDP issues including compensation and resettlement, and development projects for Darfur. Al Mahdi said the President is committed to starting work on the long-awaited Western Highway and would also push forward the national bill on electricity, which would benefit Darfur by connecting it to the national grid. He said the regime also has planned several water projects for Darfur. Al Mannan said that following the conference, the regime will send a delegation to present the results to rebel leaders including SLM leader Abdel Wahid Al Nur. They noted that Al Nur is particularly difficult to meet with (often rejecting overtures from the GOS) and requested US assistance in facilitating a meeting with Al Nur. The regime will also send a delegation to meet with Chad and other countries in the region that can play a positive role in ending the conflict. The NCP leaders asked for American pressure on Chad and Libya (who arm and fund the rebels) to bring about a solution to the problem.

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15. (C) Al Mahdi stated that Darfurians are split on the question of whether Darfur should be one state. He noted that some Fur want an ethnically pure fourth state in the center of Darfur in the Jebel Marra area (the traditional homeland of the Fur). Mandour suggested that Khalil Ibrahim might also want a fifth state in barren Northern Darfur (traditional Zaghawa tribal lands) and expressed concern that if Darfur is unified as one state, there will be constant conflict over tribal issues. Al Mahdi claimed that the NCP would be open to a referendum (regarding one Darfur state or additional states) at the end of the transitional period as defined in the semi-moribund 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement, but said he believes there will be another war if there is a vote for one state. Al Mahdi said the regime is also determined to "open the roads" in Darfur and to end the insecurity that has plagued WFP and NGO humanitarian delivery operations in Darfur. The CDA warned Al Mahdi to be careful in this regard, because while the regime may take actions in the name of security, Washington and other capitals will only see the repercussions of these often ill-advised security operations -- such as the Kalma Camp massacre and the bombings and attacks on SLM/MM locations in North Darfur.

16. (C) The CDA urged the NCP to move quickly on the plans for the Darfur conference and even faster on the implementation of the regime's plans to improve the situation on the ground in Darfur, as there is not much time ("we never know when Khalil Ibrahim may attack,") and there must be significant progress before any Article 16 resolution on ICC deferment is considered by the UNSC. The CDA informed Al Mahdi and Al Mannan that he had advised VP Taha on September 19 in El Fasher that if there were an Article 16 resolution at the UNSC now or in the coming weeks, the US would veto it given the lack of tangible progress on the ground in Darfur. Separately, polchief urged Al Mannan to consider announcing immediately the initiatives that the NCP would table at the conference before it begins, and the steps that the NCP is prepared to take unilaterally. This is necessary if the NCP hopes to demonstrate that it is serious, and does not wish the conference to be dismissed by critics as window dressing for the consumption of the international community.

17. (C) Comment: This meeting represents the first time the NCP has actually defined clearly its strategy for the much ballyhooed Sudan People's Initiative in terms of a timeline and an agenda, but it is not yet clear whether the regime is ready to undertake the steps outlined by these NCP officials or if it will just be another piece of political theater. If VP Taha does become more deeply involved in the Darfur portfolio that would be a very positive sign, since Nafie ali Nafie has made no progress on the Darfur file and has earned nothing but disdain from Darfurians and many other Sudanese in the process. Taha has some credibility for having negotiated and signed the CPA, and a move by Bashir to announce that Taha will negotiate a comprehensive Peace Agreement on Darfur would generate some excitement and give momentum to the process, though it is also widely known that Taha was in charge of The Darfur file during the worst years of the crisis. As always, the regime must take credible steps rather than making promises it may not intend to keep, and the next month will be absolutely critical for the regime if it has any hope of demonstrating that it is serious about making progress toward solving the Darfur crisis before an actual announcement from The Hague.

FERNANDEZ